

PRESS RELEASE

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

Fourteenth District, Michigan
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus

FOR RELEASE:
June 19, 2002

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Conyers Testifies in favor of New York Reparations Resolution

Representative John Conyers, Jr., (D-MI) ranking member on the House Judiciary Committee, testified before the New York City Council in favor of the establishment of the Queen Mother Moore Reparations Commission to study the issue of reparations to city residents who are the descendants of slaves. Conyers stated that, "Reparations and the establishment of this commission are not about giving a check to individuals. The call for reparations represents a commitment to entering a constructive dialogue on the role of slavery and racism in shaping present-day conditions in this community and American society."

"The 20th century struggle for civil and human rights has created a climate for equality to replace might as the defining principle in international relations. Nations like Switzerland and South Africa have shown that confronting the sins of the past is imperative to developing a real commitment to equality. Today, we sit only a short distance from the graves of slaves who built this city. Regardless of whether a person's ancestors held slaves, all benefitted from taxes levied against their labor and their work in building this city. I believe that New York owes a debt for that labor and a dialogue on reparations is a necessary part of that compensation."

"The nation has focused on the social effects of slavery and segregation and missed the continuing economic implications of these institutions. These economic issues are the root cause of many critical issues in the African-American community today, such as education, healthcare and crime. In order to appropriately address these issues, we must re-examine the history surrounding economic institutions in the African-American community."

Conyers has introduced legislation (H.R. 40) that would establish a national commission to examine the institution of slavery, study the impact of subsequent and continuing discrimination against African-Americans resulting directly and indirectly from slavery, during the apartheid of reconstruction, desegregation and the present day. The commission would make recommendations concerning any form of apology and compensation.

Conyers stated that, "Statements dismissing reparations on the grounds of payment questions are completely premature, especially when we have not yet had a national dialogue or study of the issue. Given that trust funds that have been established for Holocaust survivors, internment victims and Native Americans, there is ample precedent for slavery reparations. Clearly this issue merits discussion at all levels, local, national and international, to develop a consensus on the most appropriate way to confront the vestiges of past and continuing discrimination."

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